



STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

A Memo from the New Jersey Department of Education

Date: January 13, 2021
To: Chief School Administrators, Charter School and Renaissance School Project Leads
Route To: Principals
From: Lisa J. Gleason, Ed.D., Assistant Commissioner
Division of Academics and Performance
Deadline: January 27, 2021

NJDOE Invites Public Comment on ESSA State Plan Addendum Request

The New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) plans to submit a COVID-19 State Plan Addendum (“Addendum”) request to the United States Department of Education (USED) for flexibility in implementing components of the state’s Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) accountability system. As required by ESSA, the NJDOE is seeking public comment and feedback on the Addendum request. This Broadcast memo will summarize the flexibilities that NJDOE is seeking through the Addendum and potential future requests and changes.

COVID-19 State Plan Addendum Overview

In March 2020, USED waived assessment, accountability, and school identification requirements under ESSA for all 50 states to address the COVID-19 public health emergency. The waiver of these requirements, as well as the continued implications of COVID-19, impact how states can implement their ESSA accountability systems in the 2020-2021 school year. Therefore, states may now submit an Addendum request to USED to account for one-year changes to their accountability systems for the 2020-2021 school year and changes to certain accountability timelines. These requests must be submitted to USED by February 1, 2021. Other changes beyond those allowed under the Addendum template, such as changes for future school years, must be made using the regular State plan amendment or waiver process.

The NJDOE’s Addendum request seeks the following flexibilities:

- Shift the timeline for long-term and interim goals for academic achievement, graduation rate, and progress toward English language proficiency for the state and each school and district forward by one year;
- Suspend the calculation of the following accountability indicators for the 2020-2021 school year:
 - Student Growth;
 - Progress toward English Language Proficiency; and
 - Chronic Absenteeism;
- Suspend the reporting of measurements of interim progress for all indicators for 2020-2021;
- Suspend the calculation of ESSA summative scores and ratings for the 2020-2021 school year;
- Shift the timeline for identification of schools for Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) and Additional Targeted Support and Improvement for Low Performing Student Groups (ATSI) by one year so that the next identification will occur during the 2022-2023 school year (based on 2021-2022 data); and
- Allow all schools currently identified for CSI and ATSI to continue to receive support and interventions for an additional year and delay the eligible exit date by one year so it is aligned with the next identification date. All CSI and ATSI schools would be eligible to exit status in the 2022-2023 school year (based on 2021-2022 data).

The goal of this Addendum proposal is to maintain the integrity of New Jersey's [ESSA state accountability system](#) in light of the challenges presented by COVID-19. That system is grounded in high-quality, tested, and true indicators of school performance that yield actionable data on the supports that our schools most need; lest we compromise that rigorous system, the NJDOE does not want to introduce new, untested data measures or accountability criteria for high stakes accountability in the 2020-2021 school year without the proper stakeholder engagement or notice to districts.

At this time, USED anticipates that all states will administer statewide assessments as required under ESSA during the 2020-2021 school year. The NJDOE is *not* requesting to suspend the calculation or reporting of the Academic Achievement indicator. However, the NJDOE will continue to engage with USED, assessment experts, and the Council of Chief State School Officers on the national issue of state assessments to determine how assessment results should be used in the 2020-2021 school year. Additional information regarding the 2020-2021 Statewide Assessment Schedule can be found in the NJDOE Broadcast memo dated [November 18, 2020](#).

Additional Flexibilities and Changes

The NJDOE also plans to submit a separate request to waive the requirement to identify schools for Targeted Support and Improvement for Consistently Underperforming Student Groups (TSI) (*ESEA* Sec. 1111(d)(2)(A)) for fall 2021. Schools are identified annually for TSI status based on two consecutive years of data, which will not be available for all indicators in fall 2021. This waiver request would delay the next identification of schools in this category until the 2022-2023 school year and allow all schools currently identified in this category to continue to receive supports until the next identification date. The NJDOE will also be seeking public comment on this request in the coming weeks, prior to submission to USED.

The changes that the NJDOE is proposing under the Addendum and separate TSI waiver can be amended after they are submitted to USED if it is determined that additional changes are required, and they do not prevent the NJDOE from pursuing additional flexibilities in the future. The NJDOE is committed to engaging with stakeholders and plans to make additional opportunities available in the coming year to review and determine if additional changes are needed to the state plan.

Public Comment

The COVID-19 State Plan Addendum request, using the template provided by USED, is available for review on the [NJDOE ESSA webpage](#). Comments, concerns, and general feedback must be submitted by email to ESSA@doe.nj.gov by January 27, 2021 at 5 p.m.

For more information about New Jersey's school accountability system, see the following resources:

- New Jersey [ESSA State Plan](#) and [Overview](#);
- [ESSA Accountability Profiles Companion Guide](#);
- [Statewide Progress toward Long-Term Goals](#);
- [Technical Guide to Summative Ratings and the Identification of Schools in Need of Support and Improvement](#); and
- [School Performance Reports](#).

c: Members, State Board of Education
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NJDOE Staff
Statewide Parent Advocacy Network
Garden State Coalition of Schools
NJ LEE Group